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97TH CONGRESS } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES { REPORT
2d Session } { No. 97-712

COMPLETED

AUTHORIZING THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ENGAGE IN FEASIBILITY STUDIES OF WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES IN THE CENTRAL PLATTE VALLEY, NEBR.

AUGUST 10, 1982.—Committed to the Committee on the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

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Mr. UDALL, from the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT

together with

SUPPLEMENTAL VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 5536]

[Including the cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 5536) to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to engage in feasibility studies of water resource development and for other purposes in the Central Platte Valley, Nebraska, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with amendments and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

The amendments are as follows:

Page 1, line 3, strike "feasibility studies" and insert "a feasibility study".

Page 3, line 2, after the period insert the following new sentence:

> Such feasibility study shall include a detailed report on any effects the proposed project may have on wildlife habitat, including habitat of the sandhill crane and the endangered whooping crane.

Page 2, line 2, change "studies." to "study.".
Page 2, line 4, change "studies" to "study".
Page 2, lines 4 and 5, change "studies." to "study.".
Page 2, line 7, change "studies." to "study.".
Amend the title so as to read:

> To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to engage in a feasibility study of water resource development and for other purposes in the Central Platte Valley, Nebraska

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PURPOSE AND NEED

H.R. 5536 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to engage in a feasibility study for the Prairie Bend Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri River Basin program. The proposed Prairie Bend Unit is located in the Platte River Basin in central Nebraska.

The study would develop and assess multi-objective alternatives to irrigate between 50,000 and 70,000 acres of land using water from the Platte River, stabilize ground water in an area of about 136,000 acres, provide outdoor recreation, maintain and enhance habitat for waterfowl including the endangered whooping crane and enhance the quality of ground water.

The bill mandates that the State of Nebraska, or some other non-Federal entity shall participate in the study and share in the cost of the study. The non-Federal share of the costs may be partly or wholly in the form of services directly related to the conduct of the study. The Committee is advised that the local sponsor, the Central Platte Natural Resources District, has already expended more than $400,000 for water quality studies which will be made available to the Bureau of Reclamation, and has pledged an additional $240,000 in cash toward the cost of the feasibility study. The Bureau of Reclamation estimates that the study will take four years to complete and will cost $1,600,000.

BACKGROUND

The Prairie Bend Unit is located in a predominately agricultural area with several rural-oriented towns. The closest large metropolis is Grand Island, Nebraska, a city of over 30,000 population. Private well irrigation development has resulted in declines in ground water levels causing increased pumping lifts, operating costs, and energy use. Some of the area and towns are experiencing deteriorating ground water quality and are having to seek other locations for wells for domestic and municipal uses. Pumping may be affecting the wet meadow complexes which are necessary habitat for the endangered whooping crane and other migratory waterfowl. Also, some of the creeks and drains in the area experience frequent flooding.

Development of a multipurpose project would maintain a reliable irrigation economy by means of conjunctive use of ground and surface water, provide flood protection, assist in maintaining desired habitat for migratory birds, provide for water-based recreation, a sports fishery, save energy, and improve ground water quality and regulate streamflows.

ANALYSIS

As amended by the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, H.R. 5536 consists of a single section which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to engage in a feasibility study for the Prairie Bend Unit, Pick-Sloan Missouri River Basin program, located in Dawson, Buffalo and Hall Counties in Nebraska for irrigation, stabilization of ground water levels, enhancement of water quality, small community and rural domestic water supplies, management of fish and wildlife habitat, public outdoor recreation, flood control and other purposes. The feasibility study is to include a detailed report on any effects the proposed project might have on wildlife habitat, including habitat of

the sandhill crane and the endangered whooping crane. This requirement was not a part of the bill as introduced but was made a part of it by an amendment approved by the Committee. The inclusion of the requirement demonstrates the Committee's particular concern over allegations that habitat for the sandhill crane and the endangered whooping crane might be affected by the construction of the proposed project. The Committee wishes to make it perfectly clear that the feasibility study report contain the type of details information relating to the effects the proposed project might have on wildlife habitat which will enable the Congress to make an informed judgment should authorizing legislation for the project be proposed and considered.

As noted, the bill indicates that one of the purposes of the proposed project would be the stabilization of ground water levels. The Committee has been informed that there may be alternatives, including the use of ground water, which would make it unnecessary to divert water from the Platte River for project purposes. The Committee believes that the study authorized by H.R. 5536 should include an examination of such alternative and that the study report should indicate the extent to which natural resource districts should be expected to exercise their ground water management authority to supplement irrigation projects, or as an alternative to withdrawing water from the Platte River.

The bill also mandates that, before funds are expended for the feasibility study, the State of Nebraska, or some other non-Federal entity shall agree to participate in the studies and to share the cost thereof. Testimony suggested that cost-sharing now exceeds $400,000, and an additional $240,000 is already pledged, an amount equal to 40% of the estimated cost of the study. The non-Federal share of the study cost may be partly or wholly in the form of services directly related to the conduct of the study. The Committee expects the Secretary to require that this share be a reasonable share and not merely a token contribution.

DEPARTMENTAL VIEWS

The Commissioner of Reclamation, in testimony before the Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources given on June 8, 1982, expressed support for enactment of H.R. 5536.

COMMITTEE ACTION

On June 8, 1982, the Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources held a hearing on H.R. 5536. The Subcommittee marked the bill up on July 20, 1982, and ordered the bill reported favorably to the Full Committee with a recommended amendment. On July 28, 1982, the Full Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs considered H.R. 5536 and, by voice vote, ordered the bill reported favorably to the House with a substitute text. Accordingly, the Committee recommends the approval of the legislation by the House.

OVERSIGHT STATEMENT

The Committee frequently reviews activities and programs involving the Bureau of Reclamation. Studies such as the one authorized by this legislation often lead to further legislative and oversight activities

and it is expected that the Committee will follow this matter closely as the study progresses. No oversight recommendation has been received by the Committee pursuant to Rule XI.

COST AND INFLATIONARY IMPACT

The estimated cost of the feasibility study authorized by H.R. 5536 is $1,500,000, a reasonable part of which is to be borne by the State of Nebraska, or other non-Federal entities. The expenditure is expected to be spread over a period of approximately four years and should not result in any adverse inflationary impact. The analysis of the Congressional Budget Office follows:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, D.C., August 5, 1982.

Hon. MORRIS K. UDALL,
Chairman, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to Section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Congressional Budget Office has reviewed H.R. 5536, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to engage in feasibility studies of water resource development and for other purposes in the Central Platte Valley, Nebraska, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, July 27, 1982.

This bill authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to engage in water resource development feasibility studies for the Prairie Bend unit, Pick-Sloan Missouri River Basin program. The bill stipulates that the cost of the studies is to be shared by the federal government and participating nonfederal entities. Based on information from the Bureau of Reclamation, it is estimated that the total cost of the studies will be approximately $1.5 million over the fiscal years 1983 through 1986. It is expected that approximately $250,000 of this amount will be contributed from the Central Platte Natural Resources District and other local sponsors.

Should the Committee so desire, we would be pleased to provide further details on this estimate.

Sincerely,

ALICE M. RIVLIN,
Director.

SUPPLEMENTAL VIEWS

H.R. 5536 would authorize a feasibility study for a potential Prairie Bend unit in Nebraska's Central Platte Valley. As Ranking Minority Member of the Interior Committee's Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources, I had the benefit of hearings before the Subcommittee during which both proponents and opponents were heard. During the Subcommittee hearings it was apparent that the study has a great deal of local support in the affected area. Further, I am informed there is an agreement among the Congressional delegation from Nebraska that the feasibility study is appropriate.

My understanding is that feasibility studies normally consider a proposed project's effect on the environment, wildlife, and fisheries. These same studies also consider a project's economic and engineering feasibility, offsetting costs against benefits.

During Subcommittee markup, an amendment was adopted by the Subcommittee and later approved by the Committee. This amendment made the normal consideration of Prairie Bend's effect on wildlife habitat including sandhill cranes and the endangered whooping crane an express requirement of H.R. 5536. Other amendments were offered at the full Committee markup, but were rejected after extensive deliberation.

I believe it is important that all the legitimate interests be considered in this feasibility study, that they be weighed against each other in the relative degree to which those professionals conducting the study feel is appropriate. In short, the feasibility of this project should be studied fairly and objectively.

The Committee also is on record as wanting the proponents of Prairie Bend to realize that if the project proves to be feasible and in the future, they may well be asked whether or not they have invoked the 1975 Nebraska statute involving a groundwater management plan, and if not, why not. Moreover, the Committee in the future if asked to authorize a Prairie Bend project may well, if appropriate, make such authorization contingent upon the implementation of the state groundwater management statute as one way to deal with the declining water table problem.

DON H. CLAUSEN.